

VOICES & VISIONS



MANY VOICES, ONE IN CHRIST

MAY 2004

SECTION C

The People Have a Mind to Build ... **Community**

Exciting Annual Meeting Planned in June

Mark your calendars now to attend an exciting and inspiring Annual Meeting. This year's event will be held on June 10-12, 2004 in Demorest, GA. This year's theme, "*the people have a mind to build...Community*," will welcome all generations to reflect on how to build community that strengthens the ministry of our congregations. Events and topics during the conference will highlight activities for youth, children and parents. Closing with a mid-day picnic on Saturday, attendees can enjoy kicking up their heels to the music of a bluegrass band while nestled in the foothills of the North Georgia mountains.

Two well known keynote speakers will inspire and challenge us toward community with their preaching. Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, the Butman Professor of Religion at Piedmont College, will preach during our opening worship on Friday evening, June 10. Rev. Taylor is an Episcopal priest with fifteen years in parish ministry. In 2001, she joined the faculty of the Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, as adjunct professor of Christian spirituality. She is a graduate of Emory University and received her Master of Divinity from Yale Divinity School. An editor-at-large for The Christian Century and sometime commentator on Georgia Public Radio, she is the author of ten books, including *When God Is Silent* and

Gospel Medicine.

Preaching on Saturday morning is Dr. Dwight D. Andrews, a composer, musician, educator, and minister. A native of Detroit, Dr. Andrews is an Associate Professor of Music Theory at Emory University and Senior Minister of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Atlanta. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and received a Master of Divinity and a Ph.D. in Music Theory at Yale University. While at Yale, Andrews served as Pastor of Christ's Church and was on the faculty of the Music Department and African American Studies Program for over ten years. With numerous film credits, Andrews has also served as music director for the Broadway productions of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Seven Guitars*.

Contributing to our time of worship will be music will be provided by the Sweetwater First UCC Youth Choir and the Choirs of Community Congregational UCC in Montgomery. There will be a mass Conference



choir on Friday evening, arranged and led by the Piedmont College Department of Music.

Additional Annual Meeting highlights will include recognition of clergy ordination anniversaries, welcoming of new clergy, and recognition of students in care.

Hosts for the annual meeting this year are the Piedmont College, which is newly affiliated with the UCC, and Covenant Congregational Church, a new church start that meets on campus. Our site represents the continuing celebration of the ways in which the Southeast Conference is growing into new relationships, with affiliations such as Piedmont College, and increasing new church development.

Complete packets of information and registration forms will be mailed to all churches, or you can visit the web site of the Southeast Conference at www.secucc.org. Don't miss this highlight of our Conference calendar!

Conference to Host Third Annual Leadership Convocation

Building Communities of Faith

The third annual Leadership Convocation will be held on Friday, June 11, 2004, prior to the opening of the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference. Plan now to spend a day with your sisters and brothers from throughout the Conference as we continue to explore the theme, *The People Have a Mind to Build*. This year's focus will be on building communities of faith and transformation.

The convocation will be held at Piedmont College in Demorest, GA from 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m.

The Convocation is open to all clergy and lay leaders, and interested adults, youth, and families, and will feature two gifted speakers and workshop leaders. The morning program will feature Dr. Deborah Krause, Associate Professor of New Testament at Eden Theological Seminary, who will invite us to explore how New Testament models of community can enlighten and enliven our search for and work of building Christian

communities today. In the afternoon, Dr. Ron Baard, Associate Professor of Mentored Practice at Bangor Theological Seminary, will lead a workshop on bringing the transformative power of the gospel out of the community of the church and into the community of the world. We will spend the day together building bridges – between the ancient text and our contemporary context, and between the gifts of the church and the needs of the world. With their extensive experience, sharing their insights both inside and outside of the classroom, our time together with Deb Krause and Ron Baard and one another promises to be engaging and edifying.

New this year to the Leadership Convocation, afternoon workshop sessions will be offered for children, youth and parents. Topics will include a workshop on the History of Adolescence for adults and youth, an activity-based workshop on Liturgy and Worship for parents and young children, as well as a hands-on workshop for church administrators and finance committee members on Using Church Software for Finances.

The Convocation offers something for everyone. To register, please see the packet of information on the Annual Meeting events mailed to all churches, visit the Southeast Conference web site at www.secucc.org, or contact the Conference Office. *Pre-registration is required.* Mark your calendars now for this important day of community building and fun!

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"I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL . . .
AND YOUR YOUNG SHALL SEE VISIONS AND
YOUR OLD SHALL DREAM DREAMS."

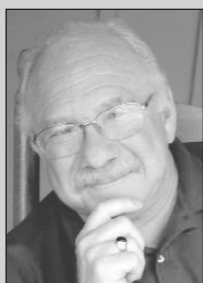
ACTS 2:17

Expressions of Deep Gratitude

Dear Friends,

Over the last several months I have had a number of conversations about what it means to be a tithing congregation to OCWM Basic Support. Why do we encourage congregations to give 10% of their general budget to OCWM? How many congregations give at this level? How many accepted tithing to OCWM as a goal? Where does this money go and what does it do?

FROM THE
CONFERENCE
MINISTER



Each month in my house when the bills are paid, the first check written is for our 10% tithe to our local church. Carol and I do this as an expression of our deep gratitude for all that God has made possible in our lives. We believe that this gift is simply a beginning of our response of gratitude, a returning to God of our "first fruits." Just as I regularly encourage church members to express their faithful gratitude to God by tithing, so too I encourage local congregations in the Southeast Conference to accept

tithing to OCWM Basic Support as a beginning of their response to a God who has so blessed us as a people. Just as our checkbooks are a more eloquent statement about what we value than any number of words, a congregation's budget also reveals with greater clarity what it values in mission and ministry than well meaning mission statements.

While only a handful of our congregations are tithing at this point, many are giving at a level of 5% or more. In reviewing the pledges for 2004, over half our congregations have accepted a goal of reaching to a tithe by raising their giving 1% of their operating budget each year. I am thankful for all those who are striving to give faithfully. This giving is a marvelous recognition that we are in a mutual ministry together in the UCC as local congregations, associations, conferences, and the national setting. In a time when national statistics show that local congregations are retaining greater percentages of the money they receive from members, I am grateful for the congregations of the Southeast Conference who by their generosity demonstrate their understanding that OCWM is not simply money

that "goes out there." To the contrary, these gifts not only fund missions around the globe but are returned to our congregations in many forms to equip and renew them for more effective ministry.

"GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE . . ."

A leader in the Conference recently said, "If people in the pews only knew all the ministry the Conference does they would not hesitate to support OCWM generously." Another leader responded, "We have a Conference with a \$500,000 budget doing a one million-dollar ministry and only \$250,000 of that comes from OCWM dollars." It is true that often much of ministry is not visible, and it is particularly true of conference ministry.

The fruits of our excellent work are clearly present throughout our congregations. Churches are calling new pastors and many are in a period of renewal with the support of Conference staff and resources. Our new church development efforts continue to expand, and many of our new churches have developed solid foundations. Our youth ministries have entered a period of great creativity and dynamism. Our TAP program has expanded dramatically and is equipping both ordained and lay leaders for more effective

ministry. We have strengthened our relationships with seminaries and colleges, and an increasing number of seminarians prepare for ministry. This is just a snapshot of what your contributions to OCWM Basic Support do in this Conference.

Among the conferences of the United Church of Christ, the Southeast Conference stands out, doubling our membership in the last five years and consistently increasing our OCWM Basic Support. In challenging times, our Conference is defying denominational trends. I believe we are able to do this because we are led by our God-given vision and are willing to take risks. We are people who look to the top line, the vision that guides us, and refuse to be limited by a bottom-line view of scarcity. People give to visions, not to deficits. Though our financial resources are meager for the challenges before us, the range of our spiritual gifts extend beyond imagination and include committed leadership and extraordinarily gifted Conference staff. We celebrate you as partners in ministry, partners whose financial faithfulness, prayers, and leadership all are a part of doing this *new thing* to which God has called us.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

Leaders of New and Renewing Congregations Gather in Knoxville



New church start pastors enjoyed networking at a convocation held at Church of the Savior, UCC in Knoxville, TN.

Over 20 pastors and lay leaders from new and renewing congregations gathered at the Church of the Savior in Knoxville, TN on February 19-21, 2004 for a time of Bible study, worship, and reflection. Represented at the gathering were one new church and two established congregations seeking renewal, as well as three prospective new churches. The program included a number of creative presentations designed to support congregational leaders. Michael Lomax, who is in the initial stages of planning a new church start, led a session on the spirituality of church administration. Toby Sanders, recently approved for ordination, offered reflections on developing a firm theological foundation for new church development. Angie Wright, pastor and organizer

of Beloved Community UCC, Birmingham, spoke about the challenges and celebrations she has encountered in her years as a new church start pastor. Bible study was led by Tim Downs, Conference Minister, and worship leadership was provided by Vant Hardaway, pastor of First UCC in Sweetwater, TN.

The warm hospitality of the Church of the Savior was evident throughout the event which was organized by Rev. Bennie Liggins, Associate Conference Minister for New Church Development. During a time of renewing old relationships and finding new ones, those in attendance reaffirmed our commitment to the building up of congregations in the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

East Alabama-West Georgia Churches to Gather for a Time of Renewal

What is the vocation of the small rural church in today's world — the church that has often gathered for over a hundred years, nurtured family connections, served as the point of intersection for the extended families, and been the center of the communities around them? Often these congregations reflect the decline of the communities and farms around them. Nonetheless, there remains a calling on these communities of faith to serve, and they bring to their settings particularly gifts and perspectives.

The congregations of the East Alabama-West Georgia Association have committed themselves to reflect on issues of renewal together during the weekend of May 22-23,

2004. On Saturday, May 22, the pastors of the churches and TAP class participations will be invited to gather with Steve Gifford, one of the leading pastors of the United Church of Christ in the area of congregation renewal to think together about their calling and their challenges. On Sunday afternoon, May 23, there will be a gathering of ministers, together with lay leaders, to continue this important conversation. This event signals the continuing commitment of the Southeast Conference to serve all of its congregations and be present with them in the midst of their challenges. For additional information or to participate, contact Tim Downs, Conference Minister, at 404/607-1993.

VOICES & VISIONS

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United Church of Christ**

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Articles and submission may be directed to the Editor at mmoore@secucc.org or call the Southeast Conference office for assistance.



SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE PROVIDES LEADERSHIP TO COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Conversations Continue to Explore Partnership Among Alliance of Baptists, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the United Church of Christ



Above:

Dr. Annie Neal, member of Howard Congregational UCC, leads the UCC delegation in exploring new ecumenical partnerships.

Left:

National Coordinating Committee for Ecumenical Conversation among the UCC, Alliance of Baptists, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

By Tim Downs
Southeast Conference Minister

On February 16-17, 2004, the first meeting of the Coordinating Committee for the Ecumenical Partnership between the Alliance of Baptists, the United Church of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was held in Washington, DC. This partnership has

been approved by the General Synod of the United Church of Christ as well as the national bodies of the Alliance and the Disciples. Representing the United Church of Christ are two leaders from the Southeast Conference — Dr. Annie Neil, a member of Howard Congregational UCC in Nashville, and Dr. Tim Downs, Conference Minister. Dr. Neal was elected to serve as co-moderator of the

Coordinating Committee.

An image of partnership which emerged from our time together was, “keeping our porch lights on and our back doors open to one another.” All agreed there is a wide range of common interests from global mission to mutual support of one another as we advocate for social justice. We also agreed that our deliberations should be marked by

theological reflection and study of the Scriptures. Among our three communions there is a rich array of resources, from Christian Education to congregational revitalization, which can be shared. As the meeting concluded, attendees felt there is much to do together and agreed to encourage the development of networks between local congregations.

Southeast Conference to Host General Synod XXV in 2005

On July 1-5, 2005 the Twenty-fifth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will take place at the World Congress Center in Atlanta. This grand bi-annual gathering of the United Church of Christ will bring over 800 delegates into our Conference and between 1,000 and 2,000 visitors. As host of this event, the Southeast Conference will be busy recruiting volunteers, making local arrangements, and making sure that warm southern hospitality is extended to our friends not only from the UCC, but from around the world.

There is a great spirit of renewal that is taking hold in our congregations, with dynamic new church development, established congregations joining the UCC, congregations seeking renewal, and active work to develop and equip lay and ordained leadership for this renewal. The General Synod will be an occasion for us to share

and celebrate this spirit of renewal with the whole church and to share in the joy of being a part of the United Church of Christ. This is an exciting occasion for us, the smallest Conference in the UCC to offer an extravagant southern welcome to the entire United Church of Christ.

Over the coming year, there will be numerous opportunities for congregations throughout the Conference to help by volunteering, participating in fund raising events, opening your homes to visitors, or simply attending General Synod so that you know the family of faith of which you are a part. The Southeast Conference will be raising \$20,000 to pay for our part of General Synod expenses, as well as fulfilling numerous responsibilities as hosts. Put the General Synod on your own calendar and plan to be a part of the celebration by joining us at the World Congress Center on July 1-5, 2005.

Local Representatives of the UCC, Alliance of Baptists, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Network in Birmingham

On March 10, 2004, representatives of the UCC, the Alliance of Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ gathered on the campus of Samford University in Birmingham to explore ways in which our ecumenical partnership can be lived out in Alabama. Convened by John Mobley, Regional Minister for the Disciples, the group considered ways to support each other in ministry and make our gifts and resources available for our mutual benefit. The Disciples invited youth and children from the other two communions to participate in their camp programs and there was conversation about collaborating on continuing

education and professional development for ordained clergy.

We noted that the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) currently work together in the area of lay theological education. The group agreed to communicate openly and regularly about respective programs and invite one another to participate in each others' lives. UCC representatives who participated in this conversation included Rev. Bennie Liggins, Associate Conference Minister; Rev. Angie Wright, pastor of Beloved Community UCC in Birmingham; and Conference Minister Tim Downs.

Take Action

Print the General Synod article in your upcoming newsletter or church bulletin so that parishioners throughout the Southeast Conference will be informed about this important event and plan to take part in welcoming General Synod attendees to the southeast.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW TO ATTEND!

Southeast Conference Annual Meeting

June 11-12, 2004
Piedmont College
Demorest, Georgia

Visit the conference web site at www.seucc.org for registration information or see packets mailed to all local churches.





Leadership Forum

God's Call and Our Response

By Kathy Clark

Have you ever wondered if God might be calling you to something more in your life? As Christians, through our Baptism, we all share in the divine call to witness to the Gospel in the church and the world. Even so, sometimes God calls us to a different kind of commitment in which we give our lives to serving God's church and God's people in pastoral ministry. That call to ministry comes in a variety of ways — sometimes as a still small whisper in the middle of a storm, sometimes in a reoccurring dream, sometimes at the invitation of a pastor or lay leader to consider seminary or a theological training program.

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

— Frederick Buechner

If you think you may be experiencing a call to ministry, check out the new web site created by the Parish Life and Leadership Team of

the UCC — www.askthequestion.org. This website is filled with resources for those who wish to explore their vocation, including a video testimony from the Southeast Conference's own Rev. Kathi Martin, pastor of GSN Ministries in Atlanta. If you believe God may be calling you, these resources will help you on your journey. If you believe God may be calling someone you know — a friend, a church member, a student, a colleague — share your hunch and point her or him to this website. Yours may be the voice that speaks for God and touches the life of an individual, the church and the world.

When God comes calling, it is not only individuals who must respond. The Church, too, has a responsibility to nurture leadership, call forth gifts, and equip men and women for service and the furtherance of God's mission in the world. This *response* begins with a series of questions—*What is the nature of ministry? How do we as the Church help an individual discern if he or she is being called to ministry? How do we help individuals prepare to serve as leaders in the church and society?* These and other questions must be raised continually, for the answers that worked in one age or setting may not work in another.

In 1999, General Synod XXII called for action on five fronts with regard to responding to the needs for leadership in the UCC:

- Theological reflection
- The nature and practice of licensed ministry
- Knowledge and affirmation of UCC

polity and ministerial practice

- Nurture and support for students in care
- Consideration of multiple paths of preparation for authorized ministry.

The Ministry Issues Project, initiated in response to this call to action, is preparing a draft of a Pronouncement and Proposal for Action that will ultimately be brought before General Synod XXV in Atlanta in 2005. According to Rev. Lynn Bujnak, Minister for Vocation and Formation of the UCC Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, which is overseeing this project, the Pronouncement and Proposal for Action is responding to the needs of the whole church and will include recommendations for all settings of the church, including local congregations, associations, and the national office. Three working groups currently include a Pronouncement Working Group (who will create the draft document); an Engaging the Church Working Group (who will design ways to help the whole church understand and respond to the five issues noted above); and a Constitution and Bylaws Working Group (who will formulate recommended changes necessary to the UCC Constitution and Bylaws if the Pronouncement is approved at General Synod). Milton Hurst, pastor of First Congregational UCC in Talladega, Alabama, is representing the Southeast Conference in the work of the Project, and is a member of the Pronouncement Working Group.

On May 15, 2004, Rev. Bujnak and Pastor Hurst will meet with the members of the Church and Ministry Committees of the Associations of the Southeast Conference, as well as the Conference Church and Ministry Commission, to report on the work of the Ministry Issues Project and to help create a process by which we engage these issues in our setting. These issues are particularly pertinent to us in the Southeast Conference where the majority of our congregations are comprised of less than 100 members, making it difficult for these congregations to hire and support a full-time, seminary-trained pastor. The question of multiple paths of preparation for authorized ministry is being considered by our Church and Ministry Committees, as the needs of the church for leadership, both now and in the future, confront and challenge us and provide us with opportunities to respond with Spirit-inspired creativity.

Kathy Clark is Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference and Executive Director of the TAP program. She may be contacted at kclark@secucc.org.

Assistance to Cuba Offers Vital Mission Opportunity

The 21st General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a resolution celebrating and affirming the partnership with the Council of Churches of Cuba. In July of 2001 our own Southeast Conference voted to recognize and affirm a partnership between our Conference and the ecumenical church in Cuba, with connections to the Council of Churches of Cuba, The Evangelical Theological Seminary of Matanzas, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center.

The U.S. Blockade has sought to isolate Cuba since 1961 and the Helms/Burton Acts of the mid 90's further isolated Cuba by denying them access to medicines and other essential goods, creating the need for assistance throughout the country. An Ecumenical Distribution Committee made up of Cuban religious leaders will receive and distribute the aid to a variety of Cuban organizations and institutions serving the Cuban people on the basis of need.

With these two resolutions in mind, the

Peace Committee and members of Pleasant Hill invite you to bring any of the following items either to the Ala/Tenn Association meeting or to the Southeast Conference Annual Meeting. Church members will then package items and send them with IFCO/Pastors for Peace during their annual trip to Cuba this June.

- Items for school children, including notebooks, paper, pen, pencils, crayons, art supplies, and ping pong balls and paddles. *All items must be new.*
- IBM compatible computers with Pentium II or better processors and any computer accessories/peripherals. *Must be in full working order.*
- Money to help IFCO transport the gifts to Cuba.

To learn more about the needs in Cuba, Pleasant Hill invites you to visit Cuba with Ted Braun on a trip scheduled for Feb. 1-15, 2005. For additional information contact Ted at 931/277-5135.

Montgomery's Community Congregational Church Considers Planned Giving Initiative



Over 30 leaders from Community Congregational Church, United Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL gathered for dinner on February 12, 2004 to consider a new initiative toward planned giving. Don Hill, leader of the Financial Development Team of the United Church of Christ, was present to offer consultation and insight. Only seven years old, members of this 600 member church are seeking new ways to empower their ministry. Under the leadership of Rev. Bennie Liggins, Community Congregational UCC is beginning to take the next steps toward securing a strong financial foundation to undergird their dramatic growth in programs and membership.

UCC Executive Minister to Address Racial Justice

The Women of the Georgia-South Carolina Association of the Southeast Conference are pleased to announce that Dr. Bernice Powell-Jackson, Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries will be offering a special address.

The Responsibility and Role of UCC Women on Issues of Racial Justice in the Southeast Conference

Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA
May 27, 2004

For additional information, contact Erna Bryant at 770/493-1930.

Take Action

In this Easter season of hope and renewal, members of congregations throughout the Southeast Conference are invited to join in prayer as together we discern God's call in our lives, and our individual and corporate responses to that call.

Pray for the work of the Ministry Issues Project. Pray for the work of our Church and Ministry Committees.

Pray that individuals will continue to hear and respond to God's call. Pray that together we may live out our Christian vocation more faithfully.



PARTNERS IN EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ASSIST CONGREGATIONS

Christian Education is the Lifeblood of the Church

By Matt Nevels

The Third National Event of Christian Educators in the United Church of Christ took place this year in Phoenix. It is exciting to be with creative, imaginative educators from all over the United States and beyond who are looking outside the box to create meaningful, caring Christian communities where people of all ages can grow, learn and have fun.

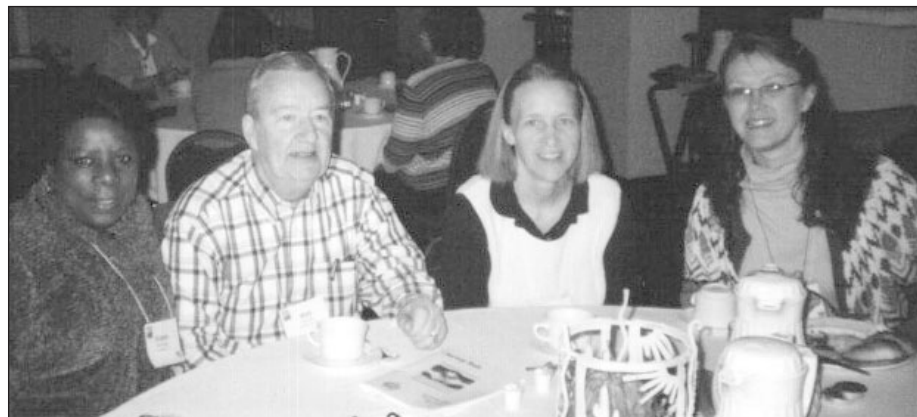
The Southeast Conference has a team of nine people, seven of whom attended the national event. These folks, along with all the other conference attendees, are called Partners in Education. Representing the Southeast Conference were: Cindy Collins, Church of the Savior, Knoxville, TN; Ginie Ferrell, Central Cong. UCC, Atlanta, GA; Rodney Franklin, First Congregational UCC, Birmingham, AL; Terrance Gattis, Victory UCC, Stone Mountain, GA; Evelyn McCowan, First UCC, Sweetwater, TN; Matt Nevels, Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Chattanooga, TN; and Tracy Wright, Circular Church, Charleston, SC.

Southeast Conference Partners attend-

ed a diverse array of workshops which they are prepared to share with congregations, including *Youth and Spiritual Practices*, *Seasons of the Spirit Curriculum*, *Bible Quest Curriculum*, *The Godbearing Life – an Australian Perspective*, *Youth and Young Adults*, *Children's Literature in Education*, *From Charity to Justice: Mission Education and Justice Advocacy*, and others.

Sometimes as Christian Educators, we feel isolated from others who have our same priorities for the church and who are spending the hours in preparation, imagination and sharing of the Good News as we know it. At conferences, at a local Christian Educators network, or a local workshop in a congregation, one can find companions on the same journey who are also struggling to find just the right middle-high curriculum or activity, the most worthwhile adult Bible study, or a creative Vacation Bible School program for all ages. Whatever the need, excitement and possibilities are magnified when we work together.

Southeast Conference Partners in Education want to create networks of folks



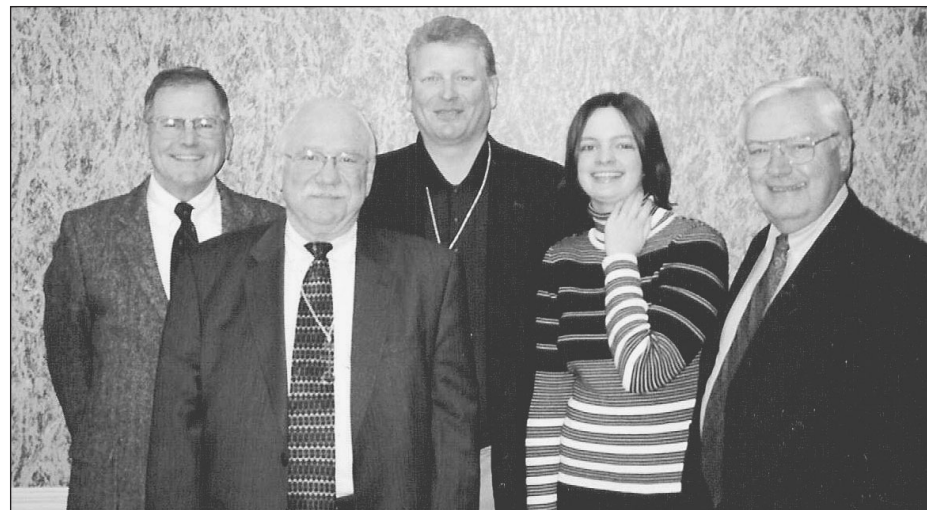
Partners in Education for the Southeast Conference include (from left) Evelyn McCowan, Matt Nevels, Ginie Ferrell, and Cindy Collins.

in our associations who want to share and fellowship around interests in Christian Education. Partners are available to come to your church and bring curriculum samples and do workshops on Christian Education. If you are a Sunday School teacher, a lead teacher, a Sunday School superintendent, a youth worker, a pastor, or just have a commitment to Christian

Education, we would like to hear from you. Please contact Ginie Ferrell (ginie@central-ucc.org; 404-633-4505) if you would like to be part of an Educators network in your association.

Matt Nevels is the Christian Nurture Coordinator at Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ in Chattanooga, TN.

United Church of Cookeville Joins the United Church of Christ



Participating in the Service of Recognition for The United Church of Cookeville were (from left) Rev. Ed Schneider, Moderator of the Southeast Conference; Rev. Dr. Timothy Downs, Conference Minister of the Southeast Conference; John Nisbet, Moderator of the United Church of Cookeville; Bethany Wilson, Vice-Moderator of the United Church of Cookeville; and Rev. Thomas Eckert, Pastor, United Church of Cookeville.

On February 29, the United Church of Cookeville in the Alabama-Tennessee Association celebrated becoming a congregation of the United Church of Christ. The congregation of about 50 adults and children recently called Rev. Tom Eckert as their pastor. Dr. Tim Downs, Southeast Conference Minister, preached for the occasion in celebration of this new partnership with the United Church of Christ.

The organizing core of leaders for United Church, who first gathered in January 2003, envisioned a congregation

deeply committed to the nurturing of children and youth and a people for whom a mission is a priority. They regularly commit 5% of their income to OCWM Basic Support and 5% to local missions. The congregation is active in the support of missions including hospice, Habitat for Humanity, shelters for battered women, and a halfway house for recently released convicts. In May 2003, the congregation leased a building with plans to purchase land within the next three years and begin to build their own facility.

WOMEN IN THE WORLD

Called as Peacemakers

Peacemaking—within ourselves, in our homes and communities, and in the world—is the theme of the biennial Southeast Conference Women's Retreat. On October 29-31, we will gather at Sumatanga, a Methodist conference center northeast of Birmingham, Alabama. Especially during the Decade to End Violence, women are called to build peace—in the midst of wars around the world, polarization within communities, and violence in the home. We are also called to seek the peace of the Holy Spirit within ourselves. All women of the Southeast Conference are invited to explore this call at our 2004 Women's Retreat.

To illumine the theme, the retreat will focus on the scriptural text of Matthew 5:9—"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." The event will feature a keynote speaker and a variety of workshops, including the following:

Working for Peace:

How can we work for justice and peace in our strife-torn world?

Workshop Leader:

Leandra Casson Jasseh, Victory Church, Stone Mountain, GA

Peace and Safety for Women

How can and should we reach out to battered women and those who have been abused sexually?

Workshop Leader:

Kim Miller, Pleasant Hill Community Church, TN

Peace in the Golden Years

How can we deal with being alone, having limited finances, being a caregiver or needing care?

Workshop Leader:

Rev. Elaine Sipes, Pleasant Hill Community Church, TN

Journey to Spiritual Peace

What are some ways that we can deepen the peace that comes from within?

Workshop Leader:

Rev. Lesley Brogan, Central Congregational Church, Atlanta, GA

Registration is \$95.00 each for two people per room; \$133.00 for a single room. This covers two nights lodging and five meals in addition to the registration. For registration forms and additional information, contact the Chair for Women in Church and Society in your association:

ALA/TENN—Jean Clark, P.O. Box 220, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578, (931) 277-5467

EAL/WGA—Lena Dollar, 1106 North 2nd Circle, Lanett, AL 36863, (334) 642-0084

GA/SC—Dr. Erna Bryant, 2472 Lauderdale Drive, Atlanta, GA 30345, (770) 493-1930



Visit our website at
www.secucc.org

youth Happenings

Practicing in the Garden

**June 18-27, 2004
Sequatchie Valley, Tennessee**

By Betsy Taylor Flory

The Conference youth ministry is developing a series of “immersion experiences” for youth that will investigate the different relationships through which we come to know God, such as our recent trip to Juarez, Mexico to work with churches and build houses for the homeless. This immersion, “The Whole Body of Christ,” is intended to help us see who else is “at the banquet table” with us, and how our relationship with God puts us in relationship with these others whom we may rarely or never see. Conversely, it is an opportunity to reflect on how our relationship with these strangers illumines our relationship with God. Other immersions will investigate our relationship with “the principalities and powers”, “the church”, and the long traditions of “spiritual disciplines”, taking into account the ways each of these overlaps the others.

As I have ruminated over the production of these programs, dissected my own spiritual practice and reflected on how best to be a Christian in both the public square and in my own household, one means of relationship with God grew to have deeper and stronger significance for me than those already mentioned. I began to believe that a relationship with Creation is a much-needed missing element for many of us in our growth as human beings of spiritual, emotional, ethical and intellectual integrity.

My own theology has strong roots in the creation stories of Genesis and in my understanding that we humans are, individually and collectively, a reflection of the image of God. The first few chapters of Genesis introduce us to this God and allow us to know God as one who loves to create and call forth, who loves collaboration (God asks the land and sea to bring forth their inhabitants), who delights in difference, who grounds being in intricate, intimate relationship and above all as one who brings life into the world. These ideas I have from scripture have been reinforced by my observations and experiences of the natural world around me. I understand from this confluence of experience and story that I, with all my human companions, am to reflect these characteristics of God in the manners in which God created each of us to do it. Further, I understand that because my creation has at its roots both the breath of God and the dust of the earth, I am inextricably entwined with both. I cannot be the human God created me to be without also understanding that I reside deep within this matrix made of God’s intention for life and the incredible variety of that intention’s physical manifestation. Nor can I live within this matrix without seeing that the ways I choose to live affect its health and vitality. My — our — ways of being in this world either cooperate with or interfere with God’s intention for life.

Yet, among all the people I meet from day to day, only a tiny handful of us seem aware of our dependence on God’s creation for our daily needs. Much less do we see creation’s import for our identities and ways of life or for our relationship with God. Of course, as an abstract con-



cept we know that food grows from the ground, air is cleaned by trees, the hamburgers we eat were once something that lived and breathed. But only a few of us, anymore, have any lived experience of those facts or grasp that those simple statements about ground and air and cows reflect miraculously intricate sets of relationships. Rarely do we understand that we are connected in very intimate ways to creatures, environments and cultures that we know nothing about. We did not come by this disconnected view of the world on our own but were taught it by our families, education system, economy, society and, sadly, sometimes by the church.

As members of a North American culture which consumes vastly more resources and produces vastly more pollution per person than any other culture it is dangerous for us to continue to think in this disconnected manner — dangerous for us, dangerous for the billions of poor on the planet who suffer disproportionately from the results of our over-consumption and pollution, dangerous for the non-human beings of this world. Our continuing refusal to acknowledge the connections between our actions and their effects across the globe may very soon cause some irreversible collapse of our planet’s ability to carry out God’s intention for life.

It is always the Church’s job to speak for God’s intention for life. So it seems essential that the Church take up the task of teaching a transformed way of being in relationship with our planet. This is our purpose in creating an immer-

sion experience about relationship with God through relationship with creation: to take some small steps in the direction of taking up this task.

To that end, 25 youth and adults will gather this summer at Sequatchie Cove Farm for “Practicing in the Garden”, our immersion that explores relationship with God through relationship with creation. We will encounter God’s creation through hiking, canoeing, working on the farm and eating food we tend during the day. And we’ll find out what happens to communities of human and non-human beings when the desire for more and more stuff outstrips creation’s ability to cleanse and renew itself. We’ll spend some time imagining different ways of going about things, drawing on both ancient Christian traditions and the latest in cutting-edge technologies. When we have done these things, we will look at ways we can carry what we’ve learned back into our churches.

We are blessed to have received funding from both the Valparaiso Project and the Genesis Fund of the UCC, so that we have good scholarship funding and seed money for participants to create projects in their churches. We are deeply grateful to these granting bodies and look forward to the fruits we might harvest this summer on the farm. For additional information on Practicing in the Garden, contact Betsy at 404/607-1993.

Betsy Taylor Flory is the Director of Youth Ministries for the Southeast Conference and also serves as Minister of Youth at Open Community Church in Atlanta, GA. She may be contacted at bflory@secucc.org.



Whole Body of Christ Program Travels to Seoul, Korea

July 16-31, 2005

Next in our series of explorations of "the whole body of Christ", we will travel to Seoul, Korea on July 16-31, 2005 and visit Bo Gum, our Conference's sister church. There we will spend two weeks in Seoul working in church programs that feed the poor and assist the elderly. We will work in a pre-school program that serves the poor neighborhood around the church and enjoy fellowship with Bo Gum's youth group. In addition, we will travel to Buddhist shrines and cultural sites in other cities to see inside the culture and try to understand how the church is different in places where it is not the predominant way of believing. The cost is \$1200.00 per person. Please note that dates and costs are subject to change pending confirmation of travel arrangements.



Parishioners Find Valuable Assistance in the Resource Center's On-Line Catalogs

The Resource Center is an ecumenical resource center that serves the members of the Presbyterian, Church (USA) of Greater Atlanta and Cherokee Presbyteries, the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, and the Southeastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The center has over 5,000 resources that are loaned out for personal or church use. Included in the collection are books, videos, magazines, curriculum, and audio/visual equipment.

In a recent change, the Regional Resource Center and The Resource Connection websites now offers a search

friendly On-line Catalog, which is updated weekly. The option to browse the catalog in person at the center still exists, but the option to now search for resources over the internet via the On-line Catalog provides a more user friendly resource for many members. The collection of resources can be searched by title, author, publisher, or summary. Check it out for yourself by visiting www.regionalresource.org and www.theresourceconnection.org. Or visit the resource center in person at the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta Office on 1024 Ponce de Leon Avenue, NE, Atlanta, GA. For additional information, call 404/898-0711.

Pilot Program Offers New Youth Ministry Leadership Training

Ten wildly dedicated lay and ordained youth ministers braved Atlanta's afternoon traffic on a recent Friday, to come together and learn more effective ways of creating youth ministries in their churches. Representing seven churches from three states, our first Youth Ministry Leadership class is off to a wonderful start. We began by reflecting on our personal theologies, thinking about how our own images of God affect the things we believe God does and then working toward understanding how God uses the gifts of teenagers in the church. Each participant began a "vision statement" of youth ministry that they will develop and refine over the coming months.

That refinement will take place as these ten gather about every two months for the next eighteen months to explore other topics such as the history of adolescence, teaching skills and the development of bible studies, self-care for youth ministers, worship and other indispensable skills.

This is a pilot program developed in cooperation with the Youth Theological Institute at Candler School of Theology and the youth ministries program of the Southeast Conference. This is our first step toward creating a youth ministry certification program to help our churches tailor youth programs to their specific contexts. We are most grateful for the assistance of David White, who brought this opportunity to our attention and to all the youth leader participants who are such willing and able partners in our experiment. Stay tuned for reports on our progress and watch for our graduation. Note: Graduates will be wonderful resources for churches who want to develop stronger youth programs!



Annual Meeting to Highlight the History of Adolescence

Did you know that staying in school through the teen years was originally promoted by businesses that wanted to sell their products to a captive target market?? Find that hard to believe? Then try something new at annual meeting this year! David White from Youth Theological Institute will do an interactive presentation for youth and their parents, mentors

and youth leaders on the history of adolescence! We guarantee you will be surprised!

Then join Julie Mavity and learn ways you as young people can make yourselves heard in your congregations and schools. (PLUS, we'll have a great fellowship, time to hang out, and a service project.)

EQUIPPING CONGREGATIONS FOR MINISTRY

Church and Ministry Committees of the Southeast Conference to Consider Challenges

On Saturday, May 15th, the Church and Ministry Committees of the Associations of the Southeast Conference will gather to consider the continuing challenges of equipping the ministries of the congregations of the Southeast Conference. This conversation parallels one that has been taking place in the national setting of the United Church of Christ for over ten years. The meeting will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Central Congregational Church, UCC in Atlanta. Coordinating the program and resources for the day will be Rev. Lyn Bujnak, of the Parish Life and Leadership Team of the UCC; Rev. Kathy Clark, Associate Conference Minister; and Rev. Tim

Downs, Conference Minister.

The conversation will include consideration of multiple tracks for preparation for ordained ministry, the equipping of licensed lay ministers, developing effective lay leadership for ministry in local congregations, and exploring equivalency to traditional theological education. This significant conversation acknowledges that the traditional ways of training ministers are no longer sufficient to provide effective faithful and learned ministry in many of our congregations. The Southeast Conference has been a pioneer in these conversations, particularly in light of the reality that over half our congregations have less than 100 members.

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND

National Youth Event

University of
Tennessee, Knoxville
July 22-26, 2004

Concerts by Ken Medema, Dave Kennick,
and Rodney and Greg Milton!

Keynotes by Craig Kohlenberger and
awesome youth preachers!

Over 100 different workshop topics,
plus service projects, After Hours Extravaganza
and
4000 new friends you haven't yet met

Late registration continues through June 1
For information and registration materials go to
www.ucc.org and search for youth.

DON'T MISS THE NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE!

All articles and announcements for the July/August edition of Voices & Visions must be submitted no later than June 15 to Mary Kendrick Moore, Editor, at mmmoore@mindspring.com.

To coordinate with the mailing date of July 27, announcements about upcoming events should include events scheduled after August 5.



Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul



Truth and Reconciliation

By Joyce Hollyday

On the morning of November 3, 1979, members of the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi party opened fire on a group of people marching for racial and economic justice in Greensboro, North Carolina. The legacy of the Greensboro Massacre has been an unhealed pain that still divides the city almost twenty-five years later. A broad coalition of concerned community leaders is calling the city to engage in the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, with the hope of determining the truth behind the massacre and fostering greater understanding and unity.

Some of the leaders have received harassing phone calls and death threats. Last spring, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa made a visit to Greensboro, to lend his support to the truth-telling process. He told those involved that they needed most of all to be spiritually prepared. On a weekend last fall that included All Saints Day and the anniversary of the massacre, supporters from around the country gathered in Greensboro to pray and share.

We heard from David Potorti, of the group September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. David's oldest brother worked at the World Trade Center and was killed in the terrorist attack. David was an outspoken critic of the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan, and was accused of being un-American and unpatriotic. He spoke to us of reconciliation and an end to retaliatory violence as the only way forward in these challenging times.

I had the great honor of sharing a panel with Rev. Nelson Johnson, who was wounded in the massacre and is a driving force behind the reconciliation project; Eduardo Gonzalez, who was the coordinator of Peru's human rights hearings, which addressed the murder and disappearance of 69,000 Peruvians; and Rev. Bongoni Finca, who was one of South Africa's seventeen Truth and Reconciliation commissioners. Holding his infant daughter Amaya in his arms,

Eduardo said to us, "You have a great responsibility at this particular moment in history, in this strategic country in the world." The world is tired of U.S. arrogance, he said. It is waiting for "this truth-telling in the heart of the country."

Bongoni echoed this sentiment, saying that this was a historic moment not only for Greensboro, but for our country—and because of the U.S. role in the world, for the family of nations as well. He spoke of South Africa's decisive moment, when that nation decided to begin its Truth and Reconciliation process. "Where we could have called for revenge," he said, "we decided to call for forgiveness. Where we could have called for retribution, we decided to call for reconciliation...It was the triumph of love over hate, reason over passion, peace over war."

When I was in South Africa to observe the Truth and Reconciliation hearings in 1997, I met several South Africans who had been victims of "forced removals"—taken away at gunpoint from their homes when their neighborhoods were declared "white areas" by the apartheid government. Rev. Courtney Sampson, an Anglican priest in Cape Town, said to me, speaking of the United States, "You had 'forced removals' not up the road, not to a hill far away, not across the river, not across the railway line—but from one continent to another."

This is the truth that we must tell. Until we tell the truth about our genocidal policies toward native peoples, our enslavement of millions of Africans, Jim Crow segregation and lynchings and the ongoing legacy of racism in this country—until we tell these things, we are living a lie—and we will never heal. My response to Courtney's comment was, "We need to talk about it, but we never will. Not in my lifetime."

I am delighted and moved beyond words that I was wrong. It's starting in Greensboro. I pray that our sisters and brothers there will move forward with strength, courage, and grace; that we might each find ways to offer our prayers, our resources, and our hopes to their search for the truth; and that we will do our own hard work of confessing what needs to be confessed and seeking reconciliation.

CONFERENCE CALENDAR

MAY 8

Ecclesiastical Council, Georgia South Carolina Association
First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, GA

MAY 15

Conference Wide Ministries Issues Consultation with National Staff
Central Congregational Church UCC, Atlanta, GA

MAY 22-23

East Alabama-West Georgia Association Consultation on Church Renewal North Main Congregational Christian UCC, Roanoke, AL

MAY 28

Georgia-South Carolina Association Women's Meeting
Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA

JUNE 10

Youth Ministry Leadership Training
Piedmont College, Demorest, GA

JUNE 11

Leadership Convocation
Piedmont College, Demorest, GA

JUNE 11-12

Southeast Conference Annual Meeting
Piedmont College, Demorest, GA

JUNE 18-27

Youth Event: Practicing in the Garden

JULY 22-26

The E-Attitude: National UCC Youth Event
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

JULY 23-25

SEC Board of Directors Retreat — Location TBA

AUGUST 3-5

New Church Leadership Training Event, Atlanta, GA

AUGUST 5-7

National Evangelism Gathering, Atlanta, GA

CONCERNS AND CELEBRATIONS

OUR CONCERNS

Edna Menchhofer, who is married to David Menchhofer, retired minister, and members of First Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, is recuperating from a broken hip.

Jim Deming, interim pastor at Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville, asks for prayers as he tends to his father in Texas who is seriously ill.

Bennie Liggins, pastor of Community Congregational Church UCC, asks to be remembered as he cares for his father who has cancer.

OUR CELEBRATIONS

Clyde "Bud" Precise was installed as pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Birmingham on February 8. This service of covenant between church and association completed the process by which Precise obtained Dual Standing in both the UCC and his primary denomination, the United Methodist Church. The Rev. Dr. Donald Shockley preached the sermon and Conference Minister Tim Downs officiated on behalf of the Alabama-Tennessee Association. Precise, an Alabama native, has served churches in the North Alabama and Alabama-West Florida UMC conferences since 1957.

James Metzger was ordained to the ministry on Sunday, March 21 at First United Church (E&R) in Nashville. Presenting him for ordination was Dr. Jim Hudnut-Bleumer, Dean at Vanderbilt, and the Moderator of First United. Liturgy was led by the interim pastor of First Church, Dr. Bronson Netterville, members Ruby Cloud and Mark Young,

the Rev. Ann Schoup of Community Church, Pleasant Hill, Tenn., and Dr. Tim Downs, Conference Minister. The Rev. Tom Baird of Knoxville's Church of the Savior and chair of the Association Church and Ministry Committee officiated at the ceremony of the laying on of hands. Metzger has been called by Vanderbilt University to a teaching position while he continues his work on a Ph.D. in New Testament.

Lewis Tait, pastor of New Life UCC, Tucker, GA, was inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Board of Preachers of Morehouse College.

Ashley Cook, Chaplain and Director of Church Relations at Piedmont College and pastor of Covenant Congregational Church was recently installed as President of the National Association of College and University Chaplains.

Bill Jackson, Director of Counseling and Pastoral Relations at Piedmont College, was appointed by Governor Sonny Purdue to the Composite Licensing Board for Marriage and Family Therapists, Professional Counselors and Social Workers of Georgia.

MINISTRY TRANSITIONS

Rev. Dr. Wilson Q. Welch, Jr., pastor of Howard Congregational Church, has announced his retirement following almost 30 years of ministry there.

Lawrence Clark, member of Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville, who is serving as a hospital chaplain, is now also serving as a preacher at a small Presbyterian congregation in the Nashville area.

Diantha Brown, interim minister at First UCC,

Belvedere, TN, is transferring her ministerial standing from Iowa to the Ala-Tenn Association.

Elaine Blanchard, formerly pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Birmingham, has transferred her standing to the Memphis area, Missouri Mid-South Conference.

Raymond Edwards, a graduate of Vanderbilt, and formerly licensed to serve at United Church, Waverly, TN, have moved to Maine Conference.

Jennifer Crane, Chaplain at Alive Hospice, Nashville, has accepted a call to serve part-time as interim at Brookmeade Congregational UCC, Nashville, assisting Jim Deming.

Julius Jefferson, founding pastor of Community Congregational Church, UCC, LaGrange, GA, and formerly a member of Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, was installed as pastor of Heritage United Church of Christ, in Baltimore, MD on March 28. Rev. Bennie Liggins will be preaching for the occasion.

ACTIONS OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY COMMITTEES

Martha Sue Carter and Myrtle Johnson were granted licenses for ministry at Evergreen Congregational Church, UCC, Beachton, GA.

Marlene Underwood, a graduate of ITC and member of GSN Ministries, UCC, was granted student in care status.

Michael Barbaro, a member of Central Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, and a teacher at Westminster School, Atlanta, was recommended to an Ecclesiastical Council to be examined for ordination.